

**Education Governance Responses
Hardwick Meeting (3/7/07) – Hazen Union School**

21 Attendees (facilitated by Robin Scheu)

Question #1: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the present education governance system in your community?:

Advantages

Lots of local control
Lots of local representation
Local involvement in small schools
Board members know administrator (principal) and staff
Interaction with other towns
Citizens of town have greater degree of input through multiple school board members
Multiple school board members – more input into system
Local control – budget, policies
Children and their needs
Face time with Mark Andrews
Direct communication with community
More local
Less homogenized
More responsive and accessible to community
Deal with issues more effectively
Community trust
Institutional knowledge
Familiarity
Local involvement/support is strong
Voters see a direct link with board....principals...school
More knowledge by board members of what is actually happening in the schools
Alignment of policies – local boards working together
Intimate connection to the school community
Better knowledge and sense of direction
Able to address community issues, concerns, wants, desires
Co-superintendent model works well
Strong interpersonal relationships between board members and school administrators
On-going connection/discussion with sending schools to Hazen

Disadvantages

Superintendent spread too thin
Few board members do a lot of the work
Too many board members
Superintendent turnover high
Super's seen too many boards
Not a lot of coordination at su level
Many boards do not know what other boards are doing
Lack of direction at district level
Boards tend to focus on local in-school issues instead of educational outcomes
Ambiguity of chain of command

Not sharing resources ex. 1 school .4 music 1 school .6 music both schools pay health care costs

Need to find more people in town to take on responsibility of serving on school board.

Different members of school board have different experiences interacting with people (not coordinating info unless at a school board meeting)

Board development

No single set of policies

Harder to negotiate teachers contracts – personal connection

Meetings – too many

Limited as small town

School choice doesn't do much

Little dollars

Diversity

Inefficiencies

Lack of unity

Time

Too many meetings for the superintendent

Burn-out of board members

Vacancy – hard to find replacements

Duplication in financial/fiscal areas – bookkeeping, etc.

Multiple and varied labor contracts, pay scales, benefits

Too much time spent getting ready for each individual board

Tendency for micro-management

Consistency is a challenge

Flexibility ... use of facilities and staff

Question #2: What are the advantages and disadvantages of the school district model suggested by Commissioner Cate in his White Paper?

Advantages

Less meetings

Stronger board

Uniform contracts and policies

Less micro-managing

School enrollment – help smaller schools

Higher quality of leadership

Single contract, bussing, school supplies, etc – less duplication of work

Ability to set and achieve common direction – curriculum, prof. dev.

Flexibility in assigning staff/facilities

Potential/opportunity for choice

Less micro-management

Economy of scale

Facility needs could be easily addressed – merge maintenance

Declining enrollment – ability to respond better

Possible cost savings

Sharing of costs – i.e. special ed.

Clearer lines of authority

Looking at total costs across district-cost sharing-more efficient utilization of resources

Total student count, rather than school count as a larger district, you may move further away from “per pupil” spending cap.

“Business” model of management structure

1 Board

1 Policy

1 Teachers’ Contract

State-wide contract?

Save \$?

Possibility of student and staff moves and interchanges

More efficient use of time

More debate at local level about education

More competition for board seats

Less expensive

Clear direction to superintendent

Better curriculum coordination

Better communication between schools

Easier to find board members

Better quality and retention of board members

District contracts and negotiating

Easier on superintendent’s time

Easier for superintendent to manage system

Sharing staff and resources

Collective bidding on services and supplies

Disadvantages

Less local control

Less community connection

Small schools – weight of votes

Cost sharing?

Does one size fit all?

As yet, no clear definition of roles and responsibilities

How can one board member fully understand the needs of several communities

Difficulties in getting taxes/budgets passed

Less accountability in total different governance model

Disenfranchisement

Difficult labor negotiations

School district = same taxing entity?

Only 1 pt of view from a community

Less direct connection between individual towns and budgets for their schools

Higher burden on each member of school board (field all phone calls)

Only one model (solution) presented here

Public perception that level of local control is down

Steep learning curve – continuity/institutional memory of locally elected officials reduced along with reduction of school directors.

Loss of personal touch

Loss of familiarity

Inability to account for local differences within community

Weighted votes

More layers of administration?

Budget process?

Decrease in local control

Wrong focus for State and Federal:

Focus on State reimbursement, etc.

Loss of local control

Small towns/schools may be at a disadvantage due to weighted voting

District contracts may mean raise in costs to highest paid school in district

May be difficult to pass a district-wide budget

Pits towns against one another

Debrief Comments:

Will it save us dollars?

Will the government be held accountable for its responsibility?

What will this do for the children?

How would board representation work?

Ex. Who would vote if 1 school needed a heating plant?

Will principals receive more responsibilities?

Why not have a conversation about how we organize the whole education system? This system was created for the industrial revolution, now we're in the tech. rev.

What about local control and involvement in process.

Privatization of schools?

Independent Schools already have a governance model set up.

Communication with parents

Parents should have control over dollars.

Government should have control over school standards.

Would there be a single taxing entity within the districts?

What would be the specific roles and responsibilities of the district boards?

What is a school council? What are its responsibilities?

How do we achieve greater efficiency without losing public support?

Is there a direct advantage to school children?

Amount of time on a bus? Increase in transportation costs?

Hidden danger of closing small schools

Incentives to help make shifts/change?

Will this allow kingdom children more and varied learning experiences?

School board member term?

How long?

At what cost do we put money before education?

Is this really what Vermonters want?

We don't feel that the current system is broken

Will there be a test or pilot program tried first?

What is the problem we are trying to solve?

What is configuration of meeting attendees and how can non-attendees participate?

There are still unanswered questions

Is this a foregone conclusion? House Ed. Testimony

Need more time to learn/discuss this (don't be hasty)

How will we know if this accomplishes what we wanted it to?

Gov. and Legislature are pushing this too quickly

Roles and responsibilities need to be clear before citizens (advisory council – what would that look like.. a nightmare

Legislature and Gov are wrapping this into cost containment and that is wrong

Superintendents have other reasons for turnover – paperwork, etc. from State and Fed (Cate should investigate this and remove the pressure)

What is the point of all the paperwork

Connect paperwork with high cost (DOE asking too much of administrators)

Can superintendents delegate – are mandates too much?

Superintendent says these are most taxing: prep for board meetings, contract negotiations, curriculum/ development/assessment/instruction

Hard for members of public to get this obscure topic and benefits without significant education.